

Claims:

A 1 1. A method of providing a visual message waiting indicator signal to an off-hook
2 telephone, comprising the steps of:

3 receiving a voicemail message at a central location; and

4 sending a visual message waiting indicator signal from the central location and
5 destined for the off-hook telephone.

1 2. A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of sending the visual message
2 waiting indicator signal includes the steps of:

3 alerting the off-hook telephone to an upcoming transmission of the visual
4 message waiting indicator signal; and

5 transmitting the visual message waiting indicator signal at a time period after the
6 alerting step.

1 3. A method as recited in claim 2, further comprising the step of receiving an
2 acknowledgement signal relating to a status of the off-hook telephone as being ready to
3 receive the visual message waiting indicator signal prior to the transmitting step.

1 4. A method as recited in claim 3, wherein the time period of the transmitting step is
2 based on the acknowledgment signal.

1 5. A method as recited in claim 3, wherein the predetermined time is associated with
2 a muting period of the off-hook telephone.

6. A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of sending includes transmitting caller ID data associated with a party that left the voicemail message.

7. A method of receiving a visual message waiting indicator signal in an off-hook telephone, comprising the steps of:
being in an off-hook condition; and
receiving a visual message waiting indicator signal.

8. A method as recited in claim 7, further comprising the step of displaying a visual message waiting indicator based on the received visual message waiting indicator signal.

9. A method as recited in claim 8, wherein the displaying step includes displaying caller ID data associated with a messaging party.

10. A method as recited in claim 7, further comprising the step of receiving an alert signal, wherein the visual message waiting indicator signal is received at a time period after the alert signal.

11. A method as recited in claim 10, further comprising the step of transmitting an acknowledgement signal in response to the alert signal.

12. A method as recited in claim 11, wherein the time period is based on the acknowledgement signal.

A

1 ~~13.~~ A telephone, comprising:
2 a visual message waiting indicator; and
3 an interface unit adapted to couple the telephone to a network, such that the
4 telephone is in an off-hook condition when coupled to the network and engaged in a
5 communication activity, and is in an on-hook condition when coupled to the network and
6 not engaged in a communication activity,
7 wherein the interface unit is adapted to receive a visual message waiting indicator
8 signal when in the off-hook condition.

1 14. A telephone as recited in claim 13, further comprising a muting mechanism
2 adapted to mute a transducer in association with the receipt of the visual message waiting
3 indicator signal.

1 15. A telephone as recited in claim 14, wherein the transducer comprises a
2 microphone.

1 16. A telephone as recited in claim 14, wherein the transducer comprises a speaker.

1 17. A telephone as recited in claim 14, wherein the muting mechanism is adapted to
2 mute the transducer in response to an alert signal.

1 ~~18.~~ A telephone switch, comprising:

A
2 a message storage unit adapted to receive a voicemail message associated with a
3 telephone when the telephone is in an off-hook condition; and

4 a visual message waiting indicator signal transmission unit adapted to transmit a
5 visual message waiting indicator signal to the telephone in the off-hook condition.

1 19. A telephone switch as recited in claim 18, further comprising an alerting unit
2 adapted to transmit an alerting signal to the telephone prior to transmitting the visual
3 message waiting indicator signal.

1 20. A telephone switch as recited in claim 19, further comprising an
2 acknowledgement receiving unit adapted to receive an acknowledgement signal in
3 response to the alerting signal and prior to transmitting the visual message waiting
4 indicator signal.